

THE FEAST
OF LIGHTS

RAYMOND



EX-LIBRIS-



HELEN. S. GUNSAULLUS.

502

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF CHICAGO
LIBRARY



THE FEAST OF LIGHTS



THE FEAST OF LIGHTS

COMPRISING

THE VISION OF JUDAS THE HAMMER

THE STORY OF GASPAR

THE EPISTLE OF NICODEMUS

A NIGHT WITH GAMALIEL

BY

ROSSITER W. RAYMOND



THE PILGRIM PRESS

BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO

BS 550

R 26

Copyright, 1910

BY ROSSITER W. RAYMOND



THE • PLIMPTON • PRESS
[W • D • O]
NORWOOD • MASS • U • S • A

**THE VISION OF JUDAS THE
HAMMER**

THE VISION OF JUDAS THE HAMMER

Translated from a Palimpsest

∴

I

IN the 168th year before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, on the 25th day of the month Chasleu, which the Romans call December, the tyrant Antiochus, having taken Mount Zion with the sword, and broken down the walls of the courts of the Temple, and burned with fire the everlasting gates, did defile the Holy Place.

For he caused swine to be slain therein, and with the blood and fat of swine was the altar of burnt offering defiled, and therewith were the sacred books of the Law sprinkled.

And they worshiped Jupiter in the temple of Jehovah, and Venus in the courts thereof, which was the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet.

And the daily offering was made no more; and the perpetual light of the seven-branched candlestick shone no more; and the servants of Jehovah fled for their

lives; and the abomination of desolation was come.

Yet had not the Lord forgotten his people. For it came to pass after the space of three years, on the 25th day of Chasleu, which is called December, in the 165th year before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, to wit, on the same day of the same month in which the heathen had profaned the altar, that Judas Maccabæus (that is to say, Judas the Hammer of the Heathen, for that he smote them mightily and oft) did dedicate again with harps and psalteries and cymbals and songs and shoutings what had been defiled aforetime.

For having victoriously taken again the Mount of Zion, he caused the sanctuary to be cleansed, and new holy vessels, and a new candlestick, and the altars of burnt offering and of incense, and the table with the shewbread to be set therein as of old. Howbeit, because the altar of burnt offering had been profaned, they took away the stones thereof, and builded a new altar. But the stones of the old altar did they lay away in a closet of the temple reverently. For they said, those were once the altar of the Lord. And peradventure there will appear a prophet who shall tell us what to do with them.

Now there was in that day no prophet in Israel; for Judas and John and Simon

and Eleazar and Jonathan, sons of Mattathias the priest, albeit they were wise and valiant men, and lovers of God and saviors of his people, yet was not one of them a prophet. Wherefore they looked for a prophet to come.

And having cleansed the sanctuary, Judas gave order that the place should be adorned with palms and evergreens and with lighted candles; wherefore the Feast of the Dedication is called the Feast of Lights unto this day. And upon the forefront of the temple he hanged golden crowns and shields.

And all things being ready, the Levites stood with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, which were the instruments of David, and the priests with their trumpets, and the singers, the sons of Asaph, in white garments.

And when the burnt offering began, the song began also, and the trumpets sounded, and the Levites played upon the instruments of David, and the singers sang. And all the congregation worshiped and bowed their heads. And the candles shone like stars; and the palm-trees clapped their hands; and in the branches of the evergreens moved the Spirit of God.

II

AND afterwards, Judas Maccabæus stood forth and commanded silence. And the singers and players ceased, and all the people stood up to hear. And there was no sound, save the sound of the slings and the bows from the outer wall, and the cries of the captains and the shouting beyond, where the battle went on against the heathen in the fortress of Acra, on the hill opposite to the temple. For the heathen still held the fortress; wherefore the army of Judas waged battle against them. Howbeit, the noise of the battle was faint, and made the silence in the court of the temple seem greater, so that every word which Judas spake could be heard and understood of all.

And Judas, having come straightway from the front of the battle, stood in his armor before the people. And when they saw him, they blessed him with tears; yet shouted they not, lest they should fail to hear his words, and because he had commanded silence.

Now Judas the Hammer of the Heathen was called also the "Prince of the Sons of God," because of his beauty and strength. For he was like Saul in stature, and like David in cheerful glory, and like Solomon in wisdom, before that Solomon was made foolish by women. And his

breastplate shone like the sun, and he was belted as with a belt of fire, and in his hand was the sword of Apollonius, the commander of the heathen.

For Judas had overthrown the heathen in the battle of Samaria, and had slain Apollonius, and taken his sword. And this sword bare he all his life long, even as David bare the sword of Goliath.

So stood Judas, as a vision of the armed angel of the Lord, the terror of kings, and the joy of Jacob forever. And he spake, saying:

“They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever. For as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even forever. Yea, though the mountains be full of the enemies of Israel, yet is the Lord able to confound them.

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Yet fear ye not the host of the enemy. For they come against us in much pride and iniquity to destroy us and our wives and children, and to spoil us. But we fight for our lives and our laws. Wherefore the Lord himself will overthrow them before our face. Be glad, therefore, and feast and rejoice, the while your brethren stand in battle for you and the Lord against the mighty.

“For ye remember how ye have been

oppressed, more than your fathers were oppressed in Egypt; and behold, now are ye delivered, as they were delivered in the Red Sea. For in the midst of your tribulation, your God raised up Mattathias, to slay the oppressor and the traitor; and he, dying, left unto me and unto my four brethren the cause of the Lord. Of whom I being chosen to lead the army of Israel, they have followed me with courage.

“And at Samaria we smote the great host of Apollonius, whereof this sword is witness. And at Beth-horon, with a small company, we leaped upon the host of Seron, and pursued them to the borders of the Philistines, slaying eight hundred. And afterwards Georgias, with five thousand footmen and a thousand of the best horsemen, came by night to rush in upon our camp and smite us suddenly. But we, being forewarned, left the camp, in the mountains, so that Georgias found no man there. And when the day dawned, behold we had descended into the plain; and sounding our trumpets, we joined battle with the army which Georgias had left behind in their camp at Emmaus. And albeit they were forty thousand, and we but three thousand, neither armed to our liking, yet the Lord fought for us, and we scattered them afar, slaying three thousand of the hindermost. Thereupon

came Georgias returning with his host, whom also we put to flight, and afterwards took great spoil of the camp.

"Then Lysias, the chief appointed of Antiochus, gathered again a great army of threescore thousand footmen and five thousand horsemen; and we were but ten thousand. But we prayed unto the Lord and, sounding the terrible trumpets, joined battle with them at Bethsura, slaying five thousand; and the rest fled. Then we took again this holy mountain, and have cleansed and dedicated the temple of our God.

"Howbeit, the heathen still hold the fortress hard by, and Lysias hath gathered together a host greater than before, and purposeth to come again into Judea. Wherefore, it becometh us to watch faithfully and to pray earnestly and to fight valiantly, for our lives and our laws; and in the name of our God we will destroy them.

"Rejoice therefore and be glad, while your brethren stand for you in the battle!"

And when he had spoken, he turned his back upon the people, and went through the curtains into the Holy Place, which was between the court of the altar of burnt offering and the Holy of Holies. And they saw him no more.

And the people feasted and rejoiced with singing and dancing all that night

by the light of the stars in the sky and the starry lights among the evergreens.

III

BUT Judas heard them not, for his heart was heavy within him, and he purposed to pray alone, and afterwards to return to the battle, while the people feasted. But, being already weary with fighting, even while he prayed, he fell asleep, and dreamed. And in his dream there stood before him a tall prophet, of a glorious appearance and an excellent majesty; and he knew it was Jeremiah. And falling at his feet, Judas besought to know of him the will of God, saying: "There is no prophet to declare unto us what the Lord would have us do, or what is His purpose concerning us. And we can only pray and trust Him and do our best, dying, if need be, for his law!"

And Jeremiah said, "O Judas, chosen of God, this is his will concerning thee and thy people, that ye pray and trust and serve, not knowing what shall be. For this is better than prophecy, foretelling the future, namely, that ye seek in your own hearts the present will of God and do it. And if, with a pure heart, ye do anything amiss, your God will abundantly pardon and overrule it.

"Nevertheless, lest thy soul be too

much cast down, I am bidden to show before thee things that shall come to pass."

Then without touch of hand the curtains of the Holy of Holies were parted; and Judas would have fallen on his face, fearing to look into the secret place of the Most High; but the prophet raised him up, saying, "Stand, and behold!"

Now there was no more anything in the Holy of Holies. For the ark of the covenant and the tables of the law and the golden cherubim had the heathen carried away and destroyed. And the glory of the Lord did no more shine in that place. Nevertheless, the Lord was there, in the darkness.

And in the darkness Judas beheld as it were many battles, the issue whereof he could not perceive. And he saw one like unto himself, dying manfully in the midst of the battle; and all his brethren seemed to die after him. But the temple was not destroyed; whereat Judas said, "Amen! so let me die, for the glory of Thy house!"

And by and by the similitude of the temple became yet more glorious, so that not the glory of the first temple, builded by Hiram for Solomon, could equal it. And always as Judas saw the temple, it was filled with palms and evergreens, and with starry lights. And he praised God.

But presently the temple faded away,

and instead thereof was a cave, and cattle, and a place in the cave was, as it were, a hut of evergreens; and a candle burned there, and a woman nursed her child; but the child shone brighter than the candle. And before he could ask of the prophet what these things meant, behold the temple again; and in the temple the shining child, grown in stature, and in appearance like one in his father's house. And Jeremiah whispered, "It is the Prince of the House of David!"

Then Judas would fain have knelt to the young Prince; but he was prevented; for the vision departed, and much confusion and tribulation followed.

Then the Prince of the House of David cleansed the temple once more, bearing in his hand a knotted scourge. And wrath sat in his countenance, and his words were as fire.

And while Judas shouted for joy that the sanctuary was again purified, behold a great multitude, with soldiers; and the Prince, taken captive, was hanged upon a cross, and died. And an earthquake shook the temple; and the curtains thereof were rent.

Then as one standing upon the temple-wall, he saw, and behold upon the Mount of Olives the Prince once more, blessing and departing.

And speedily thereafter the temple fell

together in crash and flame, so that one stone was not left upon another.

And Judas wept bitterly, and cried out, saying, "Wo is me! for I have seen the things that shall be; yet am I not able to interpret the vision! But the House of the Lord is destroyed!" And the prophet said, "Nay; look again."

So he looked, and saw in the darkness, as it were, the face of the whole earth.

And there was no temple therein; but every synagogue and likewise every house was a temple of God; and with palms and evergreens and starry lights and song and feasting and good-will the whole earth did make merry and give thanks for the coming of the Prince of the House of David. And he saw that the heathen were glad also.

Then said Judas to the prophet, "May we not hate the heathen?"

But the prophet answered, "I also see, and do not understand the vision. He that shall come is greater than I. Wherefore, seek not to know what shall be; but stand in thy lot till thy time come!"

And Judas awoke, and no man was with him. Neither were the curtains of the Holy of Holies open, that any man could see within.

And he said, "I know not: peradventure the Lord hath some better thing

for his people hereafter. Yet in this present time it is well that we fight for our lives and our law, and for the temple on Mount Zion, and that we slay of the heathen as many as may be!"

So, going forth stealthily, that he might not be seen of the feasting and dancing people, Judas the Hammer hastened to the front of the battle, for to strike once more a mighty blow in the name of the Lord. And God was with him.

THE STORY OF GASPAR

THE STORY OF GASPAR

...

I

BETHLEHEM

IT is something more than thirty years since we three pilgrims of the Orient followed westward the shining star. It guided us to Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, a journey of many weeks from our Persian home; and I remember well how, in a cave on the outskirts of that village, we bowed ourselves before a radiant child, lying in the lap of his mother. In our hearts we were sure that this child was he whom we were seeking — the Deliverer of the World, prophesied in our own sacred books, and longed for — oh, how ardently! by us and all mankind.

Melchior, Balthazar and I — we three — made that pilgrimage to Bethlehem. Melchior died on the way back, and we buried him hastily on the bleak, rocky shore of the Dead Sea. Balthazar and I regained our Persian home; and often afterwards did I talk to him of our strange experience, without hearing much from him, however, in reply; for he was a man

of few words, though great wisdom. Yet the little he said at such times convinced me that he had not forgotten a single incident of that journey. But one day — it was the hundredth anniversary of his birth — he spake long with me; I being forty years younger, and still, through the mercy of heaven, stalwart and strong.

“Gaspar,” quoth he, “I draw near unto death. Yet before I depart, I would know more concerning the Babe of Bethlehem. Thirty years have passed since we worshiped him with precious gifts. I pray thee, journey once more to the land of the Jews, and bring me tidings, ere I die!”

As soon as possible after this conversation, I began my journey to the West. This time, I needed no star to guide me; for I remembered well the road to Jerusalem. Yet, recalling the trouble Herod had made for us, and not knowing what his successors might do, I did not enter the city, but, passing near it, made my way to Bethlehem. The village, with its houses strung along among fig and olive groves, upon the flat top of a limestone cliff, had not changed in thirty years. The one inn was still there; but the crowd of travelers was missing. Everything seemed deserted. The men were mostly away, tilling their little mountain fields or watching their flocks; and at the hour

when I arrived, the women were indoors. I found without difficulty the limestone cave, still used as a stable. It was empty; but a decrepit old man sat on the threshold warming himself in the sunshine.

"May heaven preserve thee!" said I. "Canst thou tell me of the Wondrous Child who was born in this place?"

He started with a look of terror, and answered in a tremulous voice, "Be silent, stranger, whoever thou art! Knowest thou not that such talk may not be heard in Bethlehem?" But, after gazing intently upon my Persian dress, he beckoned me to enter the cave with him. There, with many a fearful pause and start, lest he should be overheard, he whispered his tale, which here I tell again in few words. He said he only was left of that company of shepherds who heard the angels sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," and, following the guidance of the heavenly message, came to Bethlehem, and knelt before the shining child in the manger there. For a little while after that, they freely told their neighbors of the strange midnight glory they had seen; but alas! the news brought great trouble; for soon the soldiers of Herod came upon their cruel errand, searching closely for the babe, and at last slaying all the infant boys that could be found in Bethlehem, since they

could not determine which was the one they sought. Many mothers hid their young children, and even denied that they had any; and the shepherds were so cursed for telling the story which had led to such a tragedy, that they retracted it all, explaining it as a mere dream, and promising to repeat it no more. Other children had been born in Bethlehem since that awful day; and some who were parents today had, by good fortune or by sufficient age, escaped Herod's massacre. But still the mothers feared for their children; for who could say whether a new Herod might not likewise hear of some supposed Messiah, born in Bethlehem, and slay another generation to put him out of the way? "Yes," said the old man, "we shepherds denied the vision, and all the village denies it too with frantic fear. Their only prayer is, that nothing shall happen or be spoken in this place to bring upon it the notice of those who rule in Jerusalem. If the Messiah should suddenly appear among them, they would fly from him, and firmly declare that he never had been born here! Unless the child's mother has kept in her heart the memory of that night, all things are as if it had never been! I only remain — and I saw nothing — no, no! I saw nothing! Yet I love this place; and since I became too feeble to climb the hill with the flocks, I have been happy as the

watchman of the stable. Now and then a traveler's beast is sheltered here, or a sick or crippled one belonging to the village is left to my care. But there is one manger yonder which is never used."

"I know which it is," I replied. "Both thou and I have knelt before it!"

"Ah, I forgot!" he almost shrieked. "Hasten away, or thou wilt be stoned to death by the villagers. Go! Go!"

"Friend," I replied, "heaven prolong thy life until thou shalt find courage once more to tell the truth. Thy nation is not worthy of the Christ concerning which it talks so much."

"Go! Go!" he repeated incessantly.

"I go; but first tell me, thou, what became of that shining child."

"It was slain with the rest," he muttered. "But no, there was no child! It was all a dream, mother and child and all! Go! Go! and remember that Christ was *not* born in Bethlehem!"

It was clearly in vain to seek knowledge from this feeble old man, who was likely to be frightened out of his little remaining hold upon life by any further questioning. So I left Bethlehem behind me, and decided to take the risk of visiting Jerusalem.

II

JERUSALEM

IN Jerusalem, I had a learned friend named Nicodemus. He had traveled in the East, and had been a guest of my father; and after his return, we had exchanged letters now and then. I was sure of a welcome and a safe refuge with him; and, in order to avoid drawing the attention of the rulers to my presence, I went to Nicodemus by night. No sooner was I safely beneath his roof, than I put to him the question which filled my mind. It was not altogether new to him. I reminded him how we had already spoken of it in Persia, and he had told me of the presentation in the temple of the child from Bethlehem, and the joy with which old Simeon and Anna had recognized the Deliverer that was to come. But he had begged us not to write him on the subject, for fear of the wrath of the suspicious Herod, adding that the wonderful child had disappeared, and was generally supposed to have been killed, with many others, by that cruel and superstitious king. And he had said sorrowfully: "It is only one more of the disappointments with which Jehovah punishes our nation for the sins of the fathers. Over and over again, we have greeted some supposed

Messiah, only to find our hope deferred, and our hearts sick; but the hope itself still lives, and we still look for another!" All this did I recall to Nicodemus. "Art thou sure, quite sure," said I, "that the beautiful boy from Bethlehem be not still living on the earth? Say not your rabbins that the Deliverer will suddenly appear among you, out of some secret hiding-place, as did the good Josiah?"

"True," he replied; "and, moreover, there went a rumor that this child with his parents had escaped into Egypt; yet nothing more was heard thereof, and so the story died away. But there was another, before whom even I felt deeply moved, a boy of twelve, who was found in the Temple, asking and answering questions among our learned doctors, to the amazement and delight of all. I listened to him long; and something in his beautiful, pure, earnest face, and words so simple yet profoundly wise, told me that here was one who might grow up to deliver Israel. But his parents discovered him, rebuked him, and took him away, hurrying to overtake the party of pilgrims to which they belonged. No more, alas! has been heard of him, and still we must bear the doom of our race, and look for another. Another, another, and another! Let us speak no more of such sad themes!"

Unwilling to pain my melancholy friend,

I soon desisted, but not until I had learned from him the date of this boy's appearance in the Temple, and had inquired whence the pilgrims had come. "From somewhere to the north," he answered wearily, "Galilee, perhaps; he spake like a Galilean. But shall the Messiah come from Galilee? 'Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet!' Yet, I know not!"

Now the date which Nicodemus had given me fitted perfectly to the date of that birth in Bethlehem; and I was convinced that the boy of whom he had spoken was not another, but the same. Of this, however, I said nothing, turning the talk upon other matters, which do not concern this story, save as they helped me to see clearly that my friend was restless and unhappy, perceiving the awful corruption and wickedness which filled Jerusalem, and the approach of some great catastrophe, unless his God should soon send the Deliverer.

III

BY THE WAY OF THE SEA

SIMEON and Anna having died long ago, there was no one left to whom I would dare to speak freely. So, after a day or two with Nicodemus, I slipped away to Joppa, the nearest seaport, and

thence took ship for Tyre, where I joined myself to a caravan going by the famous road, called the Way of the Sea, to Damascus. Although my search had been fruitless thus far, I had a secret feeling that upon this road, which passeth through Galilee, I might, by the favor of heaven, make some discovery.

The country is indeed lovely, with its snowy mountain summits, picturesque hills and gorges, fertile valleys and tablelands, forests, groves, orchards, vineyards, gardens, nestling native villages and stately villas and cities. Doubtless some parts of Galilee are more populous than any other region of the world.

As we journeyed through it, our train of camels, intended for travel in the desert, was joined by many a wagon of the country, drawn by oxen, and going but a short distance with us. Our road passed between the hills of Tabor and Nazareth; and one morning, as we wound around the foot of the latter, the yoke of one of the ox-teams became broken; and, to my surprise, the Galilean driver, instead of lamenting the disaster, began to praise God. When I asked the reason of his peculiar behavior, he replied: "Sir, I perceive thou art a stranger. Know, then, that in all Galilee it is counted good fortune to possess a yoke made by the famous carpenter, Jesus Bar-Joseph, of Nazareth;

for his yokes are so easy that they make the load light. And my master, who is a severe man, and would have beaten me had this old yoke been thus broken elsewhere, will now give thanks when I bring a new one from Nazareth, and will cheerfully pay the cost thereof. For it is a difficult matter to get a Nazareth yoke, they are in so great demand; yet the carpenter always giveth preference to poor fellows like me, who have broken down by the way."

As he spake, a strange memory awoke within me. "Jesus!" That was what the mother at Bethlehem had murmured, "We shall call his name Jesus!" I was so deeply stirred, that, hastily making an arrangement with the leader of the caravan to deliver my one bale of goods at Damascus, where I could recover it later, and retaining only a small pack of necessary articles, I let the procession go forward while I remained with the ox-driver, determined to see with my own eyes Jesus Bar-Joseph, the Carpenter of Nazareth. My peasant companion was rejoiced at my decision, for, as he explained, one of us could now stay with the wagon and the beasts, while the other climbed the short hill to the village, and bargained for a new yoke. "Then must I go while thou stayest behind," quoth I; "for I have left my traveling companions only that

I may with my own eyes see this carpenter."

"Let it be so," was the prompt reply; "only, thou mightest see him with thine own eyes in like manner, by staying here. For always he cometh himself, to bring his yoke."

While I assisted the wagoner in loosening the oxen from their chains and tethering them under the shade of a solitary tree, sprung from some chance seed sown by the wayside, his tongue ran on without pause, telling me what he had heard concerning the carpenter. "Old Joseph died a dozen years ago," quoth he. "He was a just man, and held in good repute. All men knew that he was a descendant of King David. That he was a carpenter was not counted a reproach. David was a shepherd; and a carpenter is higher than a shepherd. Thou knowest the saying of the wise Solomon, 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings!' Moreover, every respectable Jew learneth a trade; the disgrace is not to have learned one. And Joseph's wife, Mary, is also descended from David. She is Joseph's second wife, and he had sons already when he married her. They are farmers and merchants, but they live at home with their mother, and are very fond of her and of one another, though folk do say that, many years ago, one of

them was wilful and wild — went off to Tyre and Sidon, and even beyond, and cost the old man a goodly sum of money. But he came back at last, ragged and sick and miserable, and they took him in, and actually made a feast over him, and gave him a new share of the inheritance. There was much talk about it at the time, but it seemeth to have turned out well. As for the carpenter, every man loveth him, but no man comprehendeth him. Many say he is too good for this world, since he might easily become rich, from such yokes and other things as he maketh, did he not give away so much of his living, and spend so much time on the mountains. Yet they go to him if they be in trouble; and they hear him gladly when he talketh in the synagogue. The old men, and even the rabbi who teacheth the synagogue school, say that he knoweth the law and the prophets better than any of them."

I would fain have listened longer, but the wagoner had no more to tell; and, after all, direct knowledge is better than hearsay; wherefore, my heart beating with expectation, I left him, and ascended the winding path to Nazareth.

IV

NAZARETH

JUST within the entrance to the village, I found the carpenter in his shop, which was, like all workshops of that region, an alcove, open to the street. He rose to greet me cordially, and bade me seat myself and rest, while I spake my errand. Hardly could I sit in his presence, being overpowered by his gracious, earnest, dignified yet friendly person and air. Tall, symmetrical, strong, yet delicate, with a white brow of perfect peace as well as power, and eyes that did not only read my soul, but looked through me to infinite distance beyond—he seemed one who might command armies, or converse with angels, or nurse the sick, or play with children, or perform with marvelous perfection any daily task of skill or toil. Indeed, at that moment, several little children, among whom he had been sitting while he worked, were clinging to the skirt of his garment. He smiled, as he gently pushed them aside, to come towards me. “The mothers, going to work in the fields, bring them here that I may take care of them,” he said.

No sooner had I told my story, than he opened a door, which led into the court of the dwelling behind the shop, and called,

"Mother, let the children come in and play while I am gone. I shall not be long away, but we must not let any harm come to one of these little ones." The children, evidently accustomed to this invitation, trooped eagerly through the door; and before it was closed I caught a glimpse of a beautiful, serene woman of middle age, holding out her hands to them. Her hair was touched with silver already, and although her face was still youthfully fair, and her eyes were deep and peaceful, I fancied that I perceived a swift look, as of a painful memory, when her son spake of harm to the little ones. She seemed to notice me at the same instant. So might the mother whom I had seen at Bethlehem recall with pain the horrors of that time. So might she feel again for an instant the ancient terror at the sudden appearance of a gray-bearded Persian stranger.

The carpenter removed his working-apron, and taking up a finished yoke, which leaned against the wall, led the way down the hill. Light as the heavy piece of wood seemed to be upon his strong young shoulder, I begged him to let me help him carry it. "Verily!" he said with a smile, "two are better than one. We will bear the yoke together." So we did; but I fancied at every step that he did somehow contrive to support most of the weight.

As we descended, I asked him how it came to pass that he had at hand a yoke ready made, when the demand for his workmanship was so eager. He replied, "Once, as I journeyed with my father and mother, we beheld a Samaritan by the roadside taking care of a certain man who had been beaten and robbed. I watched him as he dressed and bandaged wound after wound; and at last I said, 'Sir, it is fortunate that thou happenest to have with thee everything thou needest for aid to this poor man.' 'My son,' he answered, 'say rather, it is fortunate that I ever carry such things with me, that when I find a human being in distress, I be not forced, after I have but looked upon him in helpless pity, to pass him by.' Then said I unto him, 'Sir, when I am older, I will go and do likewise.' And therefore do I always strive to provide in advance what I may need in haste for the help of my neighbor."

"But this man told me not that he was neighbor to thee," quoth I; "I would not have thee misled in thy sympathy, for, indeed, methinks he is not thy neighbor."

"Nay, but he is!" replied the carpenter; and I could say no more, for he spake with authority.

Presently we reached the high road, where the wagoner, who had watched our coming all the way down, eagerly awaited

us. In a trice the new yoke was placed upon the necks of the patient oxen, and they stretched their heads in mute affection towards the carpenter, who, while he adjusted it, murmured gently to them and stroked their shaggy fronts. "Always have I loved the beasts of the field," said he; "I was born among them, and for their sakes do I put my best work into these yokes." And deep were his eyes as he added, "They also are my neighbors."

The wagoner drew near, and asked concerning the price of the new yoke. "Name thou the fair price," quoth the carpenter, looking gravely upon him. In the man's face was plain to see the struggle between his desire to drive a close bargain and the silent command of those eyes which bade him tell the truth. At last he said: "Sir, a yoke of thy make is worth, as all we wagoners know, much more than any other. This have I also heard my master say, and I doubt not he will repay me, even if I spend four pieces of silver, though the ordinary price be but three. And if not, I will bid him take the other piece from my wages. For truly the yoke is worth four!"

Then the carpenter laughed, as one triumphant, and placed his hand upon the wagoner's shoulder. "Pay me three pieces," said he, "and give me the broken yoke. Broken yokes can be mended, if

the wood be good — and so can broken lives!” And the grateful wagoner, silent and awestruck, turned to go his way.

Now, I need not say that by this time I had no doubt remaining that this wondrous carpenter and the Babe of Bethlehem were one and the same. Yet was I sorely perplexed to find, in such a retired and obscure station, him whom we had worshiped at his birth as the heaven-sent Deliverer of a world. And in my perplexity I held my peace.

Having parted with the wagoner, he turned to bid me, also, farewell. But my soul spake in spite of my will, and, snatching my pack from the cart, I cried, “Nay; but I follow thee!” And he, smiling once more, said, “Come!”

As we mounted the hill, not many words were spoken, for the path was steep. But when we were half-way to the top, a flock of sheep, frightened by a couple of strange dogs, came tumultuously scattering down the slope. The carpenter stood still, and uttered a musical call, whereupon the sheep stayed their flight, and with one accord turned towards us. “They are my sheep,” said he, “and my hired shepherd has deserted them. But they know my voice!” And, sooth to say, as we resumed our ascent, the whole flock, peaceful and assured, followed us in the way, to the very edge of the town.

V

NIGHT

IT was now dusk, and we arrived just in time for the evening meal, from which, however, Jesus was absent. Having presented me to his mother and brethren as a guest, he disappeared, and had not returned at the hour when, fatigued and exhausted with excitement, I sought my couch in the guest-chamber. In truth, I was ill at ease with the household in his absence. Mary seemed likewise ill at ease in my presence, and I knew not what to say to her, or to her stepsons. I was not willing, either to deceive them, or to disturb their peaceful life by a hasty revelation of my knowledge and my purpose. Wherefore, it was with relief that I found myself alone. I went to bed, but not to sleep, and after midnight, as I lay still wakeful, I heard low voices outside, under my window.

“My son,” said one, “where hast thou tarried so long? I was even going forth to seek thee!”

“Let not thy heart thus be troubled, mother! I did but follow and find a lamb that had gone astray. When I counted the flock, there were but ninety and nine. But I brought the little wanderer at last, and made its mother glad. So now I come to *my* mother!”

“Yet not for long, I fear me, O my son! Thou canst not hide from a mother’s eyes thy growing restlessness. For many weeks thou hast seemed to be waiting for some signal that shall call thee away. And to-day, when this stranger came — alas! he is no stranger to me! Whether he hath recognized thee and me, I know not; but him I know as one of the wise men of the East who knelt before thee with worship and tribute in that solemn, dreadful time of thy babyhood. Beautiful dreams I cherished then; but the misery that followed — our flight and exile, the yet keener sorrows of other children and their mothers, the perils and anxieties of many months — out of all these we came at last to this peaceful life in Nazareth. Not in public station and glory, but as a tender, helpful, well-beloved son and neighbor, thou hast fulfilled the angels’ song, giving glory to God in the highest, and spreading among men his peace and good-will. Surely this is thy sufficient work, in which He is well pleased! And surely He cannot wish me to suffer again. Hath not the sword pierced my heart already? I am, indeed, blessed among women, yet only while I keep thee, O my son!”

“Mother,” replied the gentle, thrilling voice, “thou knowest I must ever be about my heavenly Father’s business; and verily I have felt it to be his will until

now, that I follow, among flowers and trees, birds and beasts and simple, kindly folk, the life I love best. Yet something warneth me that not for this only came I into the world. The world! It is a wide, wide world; and in it are many sheep not of this little flock, and many neighbors outside this little village. And wickedness sitteth in Herod's temple, and on Herod's throne. Thou knowest how my cousin John, long hidden in the desert, is come forth like a new Elijah, declaring the kingdom of heaven to be at hand, in judgment and wrath. Since we were boys together have I not seen him; and now would I fain speak with him. Perchance I too have a message which should be added to his!"

The speakers moved away, and I caught their words no more; but soon I heard the light step of Mary, returning to the house alone. Her son had mounted to the ridge above the village, whence he could see, in the starry silence, on the one hand Mount Carmel, where the first Elijah had preached and taught, and on the other hand, the deep valley of the Jordan, in which the new Elijah was calling all men to repent, in anticipation of the terrible day of the Lord.

At sunrise, the household gathered for its morning meal. The young carpenter was there, pale yet radiant, and before

the family separated, he announced that he must go immediately to Bethabara where John was baptizing. No one made objection. Mary sat in tearful silence, and one of the stepsons simply said, "Many have gone from the village already, and returned, saying that John is well worthy to be heard, especially when he attacks the publicans and soldiers and Pharisees and Herod. I had thought of going down myself, now that he has come so far north as to be near us. If John be, as many hold, really a prophet, he is an honor to our family. When thou returnest, we shall know. Wilt thou come soon?"

"I shall return," replied Jesus, gravely, "but when, I know not."

VI

BETHABARA

IN an hour his simple preparations were completed. He had cordially received my offer to keep him company; and after he had closed the front of his workshop we set forth. The mothers, bringing the children to spend the day with him, were told to take the little ones to Mary instead; but before he let them go, he took them in his arms and blessed them.

How can I describe that journey? It

occupied a long day, yet I felt neither the distance nor the time, so wondrous was the discourse of my companion. Everything in the lovely landscape suggested to him some profound and beautiful analogy — the birds, the red lilies, the sower scattering seed, the white sails on the distant lake, the summit of Mount Tabor, the brooks of living water — he seemed to be intimate with them all, and to find in them the written or murmured message of his Father in heaven. And not less was he interested in the men, women, and children whom we saw in great numbers every hour. Some were following their usual business; but many more were hurrying towards Bethabara. Among these, Jesus recognized friends and acquaintances from Capernaum and Bethsaida, on the lake, and Cana, not far from the road we traveled. One merry group bade him not fail to bring his mother to the wedding two months later.

We reached Bethabara at nightfall, and found ourselves obliged, like many others, to encamp upon the shaded bank of the Jordan. Jesus, who had been so talkative all day, spake no more, but slept as peacefully as a child. At dawn, however, he started up with eagerness, exclaiming, "My hour is come!" We hastened to the river, where John was already denouncing and baptizing. Great multitudes of

the penitent of all ranks, classes and nations thronged the bank, and, one after another, throwing off their outer garments, entered the stream and gave themselves to the strong arms of the prophet, who immersed them in the wave, and blessed them as they returned to the land. Yet all the while his ringing speech poured forth in a torrent, only the more agitated by these interruptions. Here and there one hailed him as the Messiah; but this did he violently deny, saying, "Not I, not I, but one who cometh after me, yea, even now standeth among you unknown; he shall baptize you with wind and with fire. He shall winnow you like grain. For with the wind of God he shall separate you, leaving the righteous to be saved, and with the fire of God he shall destroy, destroy, forever destroy the wicked!" The people wrung their hands in terror, under his thrilling tones, and cried, "What shall we do?" But I felt that Jesus, who stood next me in the throng, trembled and murmured, "No, not that; he cometh not to destroy!" His eyes were fixed in solemn earnestness upon the face of the fierce prophet; and at that instant, John's eyes fell upon him, and their glances met. The preacher's loud voice sank to a low, clear whisper, and with a look of wondering surprise, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world!"

He spake no more that day of judgment and destruction, but the people, deeply moved, already crowded forward to receive his baptism of repentance, and he baptized and blessed them as before. Jesus also moved forward; but the prophet, with an earnest gesture, waved him back, saying, "Not thou of me, cousin, but I of thee!" And the carpenter obeyed him for a while. But when all who desired had been baptized, then advanced Jesus once more, saying, "*Now* suffer it to be as I ask; for this is my duty and thine, that we may make the work of God complete!" Then the prophet bowed himself, and reverently baptized his cousin; and behold, the faces of both shone like the faces of angels; for the clouds above them parted, and a celestial glory descended upon them, and out of the glory a form like a dove, with white wings outspread, and a Voice which said, "This is my beloved Son!"

Then John, his countenance lit with unutterable joy, turned towards the people who still remained, and cried, "This is he of whom I spake; look not for another!"

As they came to the shore, the people parted to let them through, and no man ventured to speak to either; for they walked as in a trance, hands clasped, and eyes on eyes, and lips murmuring what

hearts were saying. Surely for them there were in that hour no others in the universe — only they two and God!

They moved close by me, where I stood, and I felt the hem of the garment of Jesus touch me as he passed. A new life shot through my veins, doubling all the powers of the old. Having ears, I heard — yea, *I* heard — I, Gaspar — what Jesus spake to John, to wit, these words, sweet and low: “In truth, my cousin, thou hadst for a moment forgotten the Lamb of God. Is it not so, my cousin?”

Then John’s rugged face, softened wondrously with confession and hope and a great new thought, stooped towards the breast of Jesus, but he spake not; and ere they passed me wholly, I heard, as one heareth a strain of vanishing song,

“Yea, verily, the Kingdom is at hand; and thou and I will proclaim it together; for thou hast declared the heavenly Judge; and I — unto the least in the Kingdom, I will make known the heavenly Father!”

So they passed on, out of hearing. But having eyes I saw; and behold, the white dove hovered still above the head of the Son of God!

When, a day later, I sought my late companion — now my Master — I was told that he had retired alone into the desert; and, not knowing but he might remain

there, as John had done, for many years, I bethought me of my old friend Balthazar, waiting to see my face once more; wherefore, hastening to Damascus, I pursued my homeward journey without further delay. But first I sent by a trustworthy hand these words:

“To my Friend NICODEMUS in Jerusalem:

“Look no longer for another. Verily, the child of the star and the child of the temple, and Jesus the Nazarene, and the Christ, the Son of God, are not another and another, but one and the same, yesterday, today and forever! Of which, through the mercy of heaven, I am eye-witness, even thy friend,

“GASPAR.”

Balthazar was dying when I reached Shushan; but he was able to hear my tale; and when he had heard it, he folded his hands and fell asleep.

THIS PAPYRUS I PLACE IN A HOLLOW CYLINDER OF BRICK, AND THE CYLINDER IN THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE AT SHUSHAN. THOU THAT SHALT DISCOVER IT MUST NEEDS BE A WORSHIPER OF THE CHRIST; FOR IN THY DAYS THE WHOLE WORLD WILL HAVE BEEN REDEEMED AND MADE GLORIOUS BY HIM. BUT I BID THEE KNOW THAT I, GASPAR, A BELIEVER IN THY GOD UNDER ANOTHER NAME, HAVE SEEN AND KNOWN AND LOVED HIM WHO IS MY SAVIOUR, AS HE WILL BE THINE!

THE EPISTLE OF NICODEMUS



THE EPISTLE OF NICODEMUS

∴

To my Friend Gaspar at Shushan in Persia:

THY letter sent from Bethabara, beyond Jordan, came safely to my hands; and often have I desired to make reply. But when I would do so, there was no trustworthy messenger at hand; and when I learned of a messenger, I had nothing ready to send by him. But now I will write, and wait for one that shall bear the scroll to thee.

For Jesus, whom thou didst see last at Bethabara, is now, after well-nigh three years, returned again to that place, where he was baptized before thine eyes by his cousin, John the Baptizer. He must bear a strange love for the wild spot on the edge of the desert. His cousin is no longer there, having been first imprisoned and then beheaded by Herod. But perchance he awaiteth there a new opening of the heavens and a descent of the Spirit to give him further strength.

In truth, he hath led an eventful life, since at Bethabara he passed by thee, talking with John. And O Gaspar, these eyes have seen him, as thou shalt hear!

For some months, we in Jerusalem heard only vague reports of the new Prophet of Galilee — his winning ways, his wondrous works, his deep, strange sayings. But suddenly we learned that he had appeared in Jerusalem, at the great Passover feast. There had been much talk among the people, whether he would come or no. But it seemed to me that if he were indeed the promised Messiah, he would fulfil our law by attending this chief ceremony of our religion. So indeed he did, yet in startling fashion.

Thou knowest from me already what abuses had grown up through the corruption of our Jewish rulers and the connivance of the Roman governors, in connection with the sacred festivals of our nation. Gamaliel and I, and others (like Joseph of Arimathea), looked upon these things with horror, yet saw no means of remedy. For Annas and his sons, and at last his son-in-law, Caiaphas, had held for many years, by purchase from the Romans, the high-priesthood at Jerusalem; and, thus controlling the inspection and approval of the animals or fowls offered for sacrifice, had forced all pilgrims to purchase from the shops and booths they owned. Moreover, they held the scanty store of the temple currency, coined under the Maccabean kings, before the Roman Conquest, and this they sold, over and

over again, at extortionate rates, to pilgrims paying the temple-dues. For they made known that Roman coins, bearing the heads of the Cæsars, could not be received into the treasury of Jehovah, because the Cæsars were worshiped as divine, and their coins therefore expressed the worship of idols. Wherefore, they exchanged such pieces of money for coins of the temple, and, these having been deposited in the treasury, sold them again at great gain to themselves, until the feast was over and the pilgrims had departed.

Sometimes the number of such pious pilgrims to Jerusalem from all the nations among which the Jews had been dispersed (either as exiles, or as voluntary emigrants) was more than a million. And such sojourners, tarrying only for a week, and anxious to return to their homes, are ever the most inviting victims of extortion, since they cannot afford to stay, and make complaint, and await the slow progress of legal redress. Moreover, if any should seek a more summary remedy, by tumultuous protest or resistance, the Roman governor was quick to punish them. For the one thing which the Romans would not permit was disorder; and the Governor at Jerusalem was ever ready to furnish a guard for the arrest of such disturbers of the peace — in consideration of which service he received a share of the profits

of Annas and his family. This Pilate did as his predecessors had done, keeping the matter of his ignoble partnership a secret from the emperor at Rome, and despising his wicked partners, while he feared them, lest they should some day betray him to Cæsar.

It was with helpless anger and sorrow that I stood in the Court of the Gentiles, watching the open corruption and oppression that raged about me. Here a pilgrim turned away in despair, the Passover lamb he had bought at the wrong shop having been rejected by the priests as unfit. Yonder a merchant from Asia loudly denounced the money-changer who would only take his golden pieces at four-fifths of their value. Beyond these I saw a poor woman sadly giving her last coin to buy, at double price, the pair of doves she must offer for sacrifice. The lowing and bleating of hundreds of animals, and the noise of the excited disputes in many tongues, made it as impossible to pray or meditate in the House of God as if it had been the Tower of Babel. And my heart sank within me as I looked upon the disgraceful scene.

Suddenly a young man stood by me, in whom I recognized the youth who, twenty years before, had talked with our learned doctors in the temple, and had called the place his Father's house. Tall,

strong, and fairly blazing with scorn, he swiftly snatched from the floor several of the small cords, braided of rushes, with which the cattle had been led, and, waving them around his head as a whip, drove the oxen and sheep before him, out of the court. He laid hands on no man; and no man laid hands on him. The herdsmen and the priests shrank away from his shining countenance. To the sellers of doves he said, "Take these things away!" As he passed the tables of the money-changers, he contemptuously overturned them; and these agents of Annas, gathering from the pavement in haste the scattered coins, fled like the rest. In the moment of silence which followed, his clear voice rang through the court: "This is my Father's house — not a market-place!"

To my great surprise, and that of Gamaliel and our friends, this bold act, reflecting our secret wishes, and vindicating the rights of thousands of wronged pilgrims, was completely successful. Annas and his partners did not dare to interfere or to punish, because they feared the people.

Indeed, rules for the reformation of corrupt practices and for the protection of the temple courts against sacrilege were hastily made and published.

Many of the multitude, shouting their

applause of this brave deed of Jesus, declared themselves his followers and expected to see him at once overthrow their Jewish rulers and the Romans also; but he looked upon them coldly, as if he read their fickle hearts and did not trust them.

As for me, I resolved to see him for myself; and being acquainted with John, the son of Zebedee, a fish-merchant of Galilee who had a house in Jerusalem, and who had accompanied Jesus to the Passover feast, I visited his house by night while Jesus was there. I went by night because I was afraid! Yet thou wilt understand, I trust, the reasons of my fear. If I had been sure that this was our longed-for Messiah, I could have risked all in his service. But I was not sure; and though I feared the powers that ruled in Jerusalem, so that I went to Jesus by night, it may perhaps be counted as some sign of courage that I went to him at all.

We Jews did not believe with the Samaritans, that the Messiah was to be a prophet or a teacher. The Samaritans had a saying, "When He is come, He will tell us all things!" But we understood that a prophet should go before him, or come with him. Even John the Baptizer, who seemed at first to recognize Jesus as the Christ, afterwards doubted whether he were not simply another of the Fore-

runners. Nevertheless I had heard of his wonderful sayings and works of power; and I hoped that he might have wisdom to show us, who loved and lamented our nation, how it might be delivered. Methought, if he were the Messiah himself, he would have attacked and overthrown the Roman tyranny, which was what we were wont to expect the Messiah to do. But no! As soon as he appeared in Jerusalem, he had denounced and scourged, not Pilate and his soldiers, but the priests of his own religion. And something within me bore witness that this was indeed the greater curse and peril, and that the greater deliverance would be that we should be delivered from evil, rather than from oppression.

Now many of us had dreamed that if we could once expel the Romans, then we might proceed to reform our own nation. But this teacher seemed to hold that we must first cleanse ourselves. Wherefore I was fain to learn more of his doctrine.

He sat upon a low couch in an inner room, gazing wearily and thoughtfully into a small fire, which was the only light in the darkness. Outside, the night-wind blew fitfully; and the flame in the fireplace rose and fell with it. As the flickering light touched upon him, I recognized again the face of the boy of twelve whom I had

once seen in the temple. It was the same, yet strangely altered. Then it shone only with purity, reflection, and eager thought. Now it bore knowledge, authority, and sorrow. He appeared to be reviewing in his thoughts the exciting events of the day, like one who was not satisfied with the victory and the popular glory he had won.

"Teacher," I said, "we teachers know that thou art a teacher, come from God, for thou hast the witness of his power." And I would have gone on to say, "Tell me, I pray thee, what new doctrine thou hast brought for the help of Israel and the triumph of the Kingdom of God!" But he turned his deep eyes upon me, and the words remained unspoken. Indeed, I felt that he knew what was in my mind and answered my thought before it became speech. And as he interpreted my silence, so I interpreted his. For, though he spake but a sentence, it was as if I heard him say, "Doctrine! The Kingdom of God! It is a new life, not new doctrine. Thou must be born again, even to see it and know what it is!"

"Born again!" That was our name for the baptism of our heathen proselytes. Surely, he could not mean that I, a Jew already, and of pure, long lineage, needed another religion to entitle me to be a citizen of the Kingdom! That thought

pleased me not — and though I felt the mystic meaning in his speech, I was fain to try him after our rabbinic fashion; so I said, "How can a man be born again?"

"Of water," he reminded me, adding, "and of the Spirit." Just then a sudden swelling of the wind was heard outside. The fire upon the hearth leaped up, as if to answer the signal; and Jesus, musing aloud, half-forgetful of my presence, said, "The Spirit descendeth from above, and the soul ariseth to meet it, like the fire. Thou canst feel it, but not comprehend it. And the new life is not inherited, but inspired."

Still wishing to try him further, I said, "How can these things be?"

Now I knew in my soul how they could be. Our holy books declared the truth and need of a new spiritual birth; and often had I myself prayed, with David, that God would "renew a right spirit within me." Hence I was but testing him by the method of question which we use in debate. Afterwards, and in public, I found that he was a master at such fencing. Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees — none could entangle him in talk. But that night, either he was weary of it all, or he felt it mockery between us two (John standing silent by). For he simply turned on me once more those eyes, that revealed me to myself as well as to him, saying,

“Art thou a teacher, learned in Scripture, and understandest not the life of the Spirit?”

Therewith he gazed again into the fire, and spake no more; and I stood awhile, and then stole away. For he had read my heart; and I was ashamed.

Long afterwards, John and I talked much about the scene; and John told me that he had written it down, together with explanations and comments of his own which would make it more clearly understood unto eternal life. Yea, he read to me what he had written, which may indeed be blest of God to the salvation of many. Nevertheless, it is only John's interpretation. As for me, I heard things in the silences which John did not hear; and Jesus, while he spake, looked at me, and not at John. Methinks, if John had seen, that night, the eyes of him that spake, he would never have written any explanation at all, but would have left it to the mysterious Spirit, that can be felt but not comprehended.

I returned to my house in a whirling storm of new life — the wind about me, and the Spirit breathing within me. For I had received the revelation that neither by the defeat of the Romans nor the overthrow of the priesthood was the Kingdom of God to be brought in. Not on Pilate's throne or in the courts of the Temple, but

in my soul, must the new life of the Spirit begin.

Fain would I have sought Jesus again; but he returned to Galilee, and I saw him no more for many months. Reports came to us in Jerusalem, from time to time, of his baptizing on the borders of Judea and Samaria, where his cousin John also, who acknowledged him as chief, was still preaching; of the strange conversion of a whole city in Samaria to believe in him; of his escape from a mob in Nazareth, where he had claimed to be the Messiah; of his sojourn at Capernaum, and his preaching throughout Galilee, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" — of his wondrous authority, so that he said to one and another "Come!" and they forsook all to follow him; of his healing of disease, and — stranger still! — his forgiveness of sin; of his deep sayings and parables, which smote to the heart; and of the daring defiance with which he rebuked the scribes and the pedantic hypocrites. Our rulers sent spies, from time to time, to find, if possible, some weakness or crime in him, through which they might cause him to be despised by the people, or lawfully accused and punished. John the Baptizer had terrified them greatly by his stern denunciations; and when they heard that Herod had cast John into prison, they feared that

prophet no longer. But they could not forget that this man, whom John himself recognized as master, had bearded them with impunity in the very temple, and made known their sin to all men; and they trembled lest he should return to Jerusalem. Their messengers came back to them, some angry, and all amazed, with reports which only increased their fear and perplexity. The very echo of his voice, as it were, from the distant hills and lakes of Galilee, caused their knees to shake.

Meanwhile, Gamaliel and Joseph of Arimathea, and I most of all, could not but deem all that we thus heard to confirm what we knew already. Yet were we not fully assured. We had secretly hoped much of John, and behold, John was already in a dungeon! How if Herod should seize this new teacher also? One thing seemed plain to us:—the Messiah who should deliver Israel, however else he might differ from the picture of our hopes and prayers, must certainly be a conqueror, not a victim.

A new Passover came. Would he be there? The mere thought led our unscrupulous rulers to avoid with double care, for once at least, the abuses and extortion which Jesus had denounced. If he should come, they muttered, he should not find any pretext for parading himself

as a popular reformer! Not for many years had the pilgrims and the people been treated with so much fairness and apparent friendship as at that Passover.

But Jesus fell not into this trap. He came to the feast, it is true; but he raised no tumult among the people. Only, on the Sabbath day, he healed a cripple by the pool of Bethesda. Dost thou remember, perchance, this pool, by the gate called the sheep-gate, through which animals are brought to the temple for sacrifice? It is a part of the vast water-works of our king Hezekiah the Great, of which we Jews are justly proud. No city in the world was ever so abundantly supplied, through hidden passages hewn in the rock and inaccessible to any enemy, with pure water from an unfailing spring. In these sorrowful later times the old channels and aqueducts have been neglected, and in some places the roof has fallen, damming the flow of water and imprisoning bodies of air which, by their occasional release as the stream rises and falls, produce marvelous changes in the force of the current. Thus in this pool of Bethesda, once always full for the convenient watering of flocks, the crystal surface is sometimes too low to be reached, yet suddenly sometimes it rises to overflowing. The common people say that at such times an angel stirs it up; and our rulers, who

know better, encourage this belief, because such fantasies strengthen the influence of the priesthood.

In consequence of this superstition, the pool, no longer used for cattle, is frequented by cripples, whose friends plunge them into the water at the instant of its spouting. They say that many indeed have been cured in this way — so strong is the power of imagination and expectation upon those who, by reason of long illness, have lost the energy of a man's will. And a friend of mine who is a learned physician tells me that, whereas such cures are often lasting, faith in them doth greatly hinder the recovery of many who, having made up their minds to be thus delivered by a miracle, simply wait for the miracle, and will do nothing for themselves.

This cripple of whom I speak had been for nearly forty years a well-known case. None doubted that his infirmity was real; yet many believed that he had become so accustomed to it as to be unwilling to exert himself in any way to secure deliverance; and, indeed, I have heard some say that, by lying helpless at the pool, he obtained through the gifts of the charitable a much better living than he could have earned by honest labor, had he been made whole. I would not judge him too severely; yet, having seen him

often, I must say that, in my opinion, he suffered chiefly from the habit of infirmity, which had destroyed in him the sincere desire of cure at any personal cost to himself. His pretense that, though he had patiently waited for years, no man had ever been at hand to help him into the healing bath, was clearly false; for he had friends to bring him to the pool upon his mattress day after day; and those same friends might have saved themselves much trouble for the future by staying by him, on some one day, and putting him into the water.

As I am told by John, who happened to be present, Jesus, turning upon this professional cripple those eyes which saw through all pretenses, said to him, "Art thou willing to be cured?" And when the sick man began, whining, his familiar story, how nobody would carry him down and somebody else always got ahead of him, Jesus cut short his chant of woe with a command, "Arise; take up thy mattress, and go home!" And straightway the man obeyed.

I tell thee this tale, neither as that of a miracle, in the vulgar sense, nor as that of the exposure of an impostor. For the man, methinks, was not simply an impostor, but self-deluded and mentally diseased. And the story seems to me one more proof that Jesus looked through the

body into the soul, and gave to this half-sufferer, half-sinner, through the Spirit of God, a new soul. That is to say, the need and opportunity of being born again, which Jesus declared to me, he thus declared to the helpless, the hopeless, and even the half-insincere also. Yet who of us is perfectly sincere? Who doth not profit by his own weakness? Who needeth not the stern commandment, "Arise, and carry thy bed away!"

Our jealous Pharisees perceived nothing of this; but, fearing to attack Jesus directly, yet fancying they had caught him in a violation of the law, they pounced upon the man who had thus been born again, accusing him of violating the Sabbath by carrying his mattress home on that day. This was but one of their subtle devices. For the rabbins confessed that it was lawful on the Sabbath to heal, and hence to do whatever was necessary for healing. They therefore accused not those who had helped the cripple by bearing him on his bed to the pool; but they pretended that, having been healed, he could not lawfully carry himself with his bed to the place whence his friends had brought him. This quibble Jesus treated with scorn, as Gamaliel or I would have done. But he gave a reason which we would not have dared to give, saying that he had authority, not from

man, but from God, his father. And to the man he had cured, he said afterwards, in the temple, "Pretend no more, lest thou pass in truth beyond cure!"

After this for a long time I saw him not. He returned to Galilee, and came not, even a year later, to the Passover at Jerusalem. Annas and the rulers, expecting his reappearance, continued at that Passover the reform they had pretended to begin; but when he came not, they took courage and resolved to revive all their wickedness as if it had never been interrupted.

But after sixteen months, at the time of our great Thanksgiving feast of the Tabernacles, in the month which the Romans call October, he visited Jerusalem once more, yet not publicly with the multitude of the pilgrims from Galilee. Wherefore, indeed, it was reported that he purposed not to come at all. But in the middle of the Feast, behold he was there, teaching in the Temple. And he remained in and about Jerusalem until the end of the Feast of the Dedication in December. During this time I saw him many times and heard him speak; yet did I not visit him or hold conversation with him, save that often, while I stood in the listening multitude, I felt his eyes upon me and turned my own glance to the ground.

But I talked much with John of Caper-

naum, and with Peter, his disciples. Wonderful things they had to tell of their journeys with him; but strangest of all, and most perplexing to their thought, as to mine, was his oft-repeated warning to them that he should be slain by his enemies. When Peter told him that this could not be, if he were the prophesied Messiah, he had rebuked Peter, calling him Satan; and afterwards he had taken Peter, James, and John to the snowy top of Hermon; and there they had seen him glorified in whiteness whiter than the snow; and with him were Moses and Elijah, the greatest of our prophets, who spake with him of his coming death at Jerusalem! How could the prophets thus contradict the prophets? Peter and James and John could not understand — nor could I. But they said, "There is in Bethany a house, wherein dwell the sisters, Martha and Mary, with their brother Lazarus; and to Mary he speaketh freely. Peradventure he hath given her some explanation."

Now I knew that house, and the sisters who dwelt therein. It had been the house of Simon, who, having become a leper, must needs go out and abide apart from all men. His wife had died of grief; and the son and daughters kept the house.

One afternoon, I walked from my villa on the Mount of Olives to Bethany, and

questioned Mary. She looked at me as if she knew or felt more than she could express, while she said, "I too have heard him speak of his coming death, yet not as if death were a great thing, or a thing to be feared. Methinks, rather, something shameful and unjust in the manner of it makes him sorrowful. I have heard him say he can endure the shame by reason of the glory, and also that he can go and come, laying down his life and taking it again. But I do not understand him—I only reverence and love and trust him."

Twice during the Thanksgiving feast I heard him speak mysterious and lofty truths. The first time was when the splendid procession of priests and Levites went down the subterranean roadway, cut in the rock by King Hezekiah, to bring back from the sacred cistern in a golden vessel, with chants and sound of trumpets, the holy water for the altar. In the midst of this glorious spectacle, Jesus cried out, more clearly than any trumpet, "If a man thirst, let him come unto me and drink!" Instantly I knew that he spake of the new life "of water and of the Spirit."

And the second time was when the great lights upon the high standards in the Temple Court were lighted after sunset. They shed a glow upon the

fortress of Pilate, and the city beyond the causeway, and the hills that surround Jerusalem. And standing in that brightness, yet shining with an inner flame more dazzling still, Jesus cried, "I am the light, not of Jerusalem only, but of the whole world!"

Now the rulers had sent officers to arrest him. But the officers returned, saying, "No man ever spake thus!" And when Caiaphas angrily rebuked them, and cursed the vulgar crowd who believed the false doctrines of Jesus, being ignorant of the law, I could no longer forbear, but rose from my seat in the Sanhedrim, saying, "Ye who are *not* ignorant of the law, tell me now: Doth our law judge a man without hearing or testimony?" To this Caiaphas could not make reply, but only revile me, and bade me take notice that the law said nothing of any prophet who should come out of Galilee.

But after that, his party took pains to mingle with the multitude that gathered around Jesus, men paid by them to ridicule and insult him, and if possible to stir up a mob against him. Over and over again, their plots almost succeeded; but no man dared to lay hands on Jesus; and finally, when his stern reproaches had roused them to fury, so that they took up stones to stone him, his friends made a way for

him in the midst of the crowd, and he passed safely through.

At the second feast, to wit, the Feast of the Dedication, he spake yet more plainly. Now it was at the time of this feast that Jesus was born at Bethlehem, as thou wilt remember. For the feast was but just ending when thou with thy companions, Melchior and Balthaser, didst inquire in Jerusalem, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" And thou knowest the meaning of the feast: How that Judas (called Maccabæus, from our Hebrew word meaning a hammer, because, like a hammer, he mightily smote the armies of the heathen), having defeated the armies of Antiochus the Syrian, and recovered the temple at Jerusalem, did cleanse the holy places, and rebuild the altar, and on the 25th day of December (which was to become, after a century and a half, the birthday of the Babe of Bethlehem) did adorn Zion with green branches and starry lights, and consecrate once more to Jehovah what the wicked had defiled. This we celebrate every year with the Feast of the Dedication, called also the Feast of Lights. And amid these lights stood forth again, in stately shining beauty, He who had lately said, "I am the Light of the World!" As I looked upon his radiant face, it seemed to me as if that splendid hero,

Maccabæus, had returned to earth, and cleansed once more the Father's house! Yet was the new champion more glorious than the old. For he bare only the sword of the Spirit; yet when the hired servants of the chief priests reviled him, he said, more proudly than the proudest Maccabee, "I and my Father are one!"

Again they took up stones, to stone him. But again he went forth out of their hand.

Now we have tidings that he hath returned to that very Bethabara beyond Jordan where thou didst see him last, and whence thou didst send to me thy message concerning him. There he abideth at this time, perchance, as I said at the beginning of this letter, that he may receive again the Spirit from above. Yet am I sure in my heart that he will come once more to Jerusalem.

But oh! my friend, still am I not sure that this is the Messiah of my people, whom our prophets have foretold. For how can the Messiah be defeated? Nevertheless, this I know, that Jesus is from God and that at his word I have been born again, so that whether he be the Deliverer of Israel or no, he is the Saviour of my soul!

The shadows of terrible coming things for him, for Jerusalem, and for us all, do indeed lie upon us. But the new life is

life eternal; and the new light is the light of the world that is and is to come; and the water of which my soul hath tasted is that of which a man having drunk, he shall never thirst again. Wherefore, O Gaspar! I sit no longer in fear and darkness, as thou didst see me when thou camest to me by night. Truly I might have cause to despair; for the wicked spirit of our rulers, cast out for a time, hath returned sevenfold; and hypocrites deceive, and robbers plunder, and tyrants oppress our wretched nation. Once already Pilate hath defied our law and slain many thousands of our people who resisted him. It is easy for them who discern the signs of the times to see that our land, our city, and our temple await some swift and sure destruction. Yet even in my sorrowful foreboding I feel a peace beyond mine understanding — as if I had indeed been born again, receiving into my human life the life of God, albeit I know not yet whether Jesus, lover and Saviour of my soul, be the Christ or no!

NICODEMUS.

A NIGHT WITH GAMALIEL

A NIGHT WITH GAMALIEL

∴

IN the court of a handsome villa outside of Jerusalem, four men were seated upon rugs which covered a part of the marble floor. In the center of the court a fountain cooled the air, and through the gateway could be seen in the distance the gilded Temple upon Mount Zion, shining in the sunset. As the four men talked earnestly together, they turned from time to time and gazed towards the Temple.

It was the 25th of December, as we now reckon time, and the Feast of Lights was going on at Jerusalem, in commemoration of that great day when the hero, Judas Maccabæus, having recaptured the House of the Lord from the hands of the Syrian tyrant Antiochus, cleansed the sacred shrine, rebuilt the altar of Jehovah, and adorned the place with evergreens and lights for its dedication. Wherefore, that Feast of the Dedication was called also the Feast of Lights.

While the four men talked, the sunset faded from the sky, and they saw on Mount Zion the flaming torches, mounted on high standards, and illuminating the whole of

Jerusalem, with which the Hebrews celebrated that feast, as well as the preceding Thanksgiving.

The oldest of the four men was the owner of the house — the venerable and beloved Gamaliel, formerly an instructor in the University at Jerusalem, and now the president of the Council. Gamaliel was a learned, just, and tolerant man. Though he never became a disciple of Jesus Christ, he opposed the persecution of the Master and of his followers; and his courageous benevolence was proved by the presence in his house at this time of the three other men.

One of these was Nicodemus, who had been, as we all remember, a member of the Council with Gamaliel, had secretly visited Jesus by night, and had afterwards shown himself openly a disciple when he boldly obtained from Pilate the body of the crucified Lord. After that, he had been deposed from the Council, and hunted as a Christian by the vindictive Jewish rulers; but he had found safe refuge in the country-house of his old friend Gamaliel, where he was now living. For Gamaliel, while he could not check the first rage of persecution, had not hesitated to protect its victims whenever this was possible; and doubtless it was due in large part to his influence, that the fierceness of the rulers had somewhat declined.

Moreover, he liked to talk with Nicodemus concerning the politics of the day, and the new faith which was called "The Way." And Nicodemus also liked to talk. For they were both called Rabbi; and the business of a rabbi is to talk.

The third man was a friend of Nicodemus — Gaspar, the Persian Zoroastrian — the youngest of the Three Wise Men, he who had revisited Bethlehem, had met Jesus at Nazareth and had seen the baptism at Bethabara (as narrated in "The Story of Gaspar"), and to whom Nicodemus had written the letter known as "The Epistle of Nicodemus." Deeply impressed by that letter, and by the later news of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and the persecution of the disciples, Gaspar, having at last learned of the safety and the hiding-place of Nicodemus, had journeyed from Persia to see his friend once more.

But the fourth man had, perhaps, more to hear and to tell than any of the other three. He was the youngest of all, not yet forty years old, rather small of stature, but exceedingly handsome, active, and strong. His eyes had been dimmed by some strange past blindness, but when he turned them upon any one, with an intent gaze while he spoke, they had a peculiar glow — as if they were flashing behind a veil — which thrilled the hearer

as much as his speech. And his lithe body was that of a trained athlete — capable of wrestling or racing or swimming or wearing and using a soldier's armor, or even of fighting and overcoming wild beasts in the arena. He might have stood as the model for a statue of Mercury, the beautiful, swift, strong messenger of the gods.

But he was, above all, instinctively a passionate orator. While he talked he walked up and down, gesticulating freely and pouring out his words in a torrent.

This was Saul of Tarsus, a former pupil of Gamaliel, and one whose fiery temper had outrun his teacher's mild instructions. He had taken part in the cruel stoning of Stephen, and had distinguished himself as a hot and headlong pursuer of innocent men and women. After that, it was reported that he had been suddenly converted by a vision of the Lord Jesus. And then he had disappeared for nearly three years. Now he was returning for the first time to Jerusalem, where both parties would be likely to receive him with hatred — the rulers, because he had forsaken their cause; the Christians, because they could not believe in the sincerity of his repentance or honor him as an Apostle, after the havoc he had wrought among them. But he did not appear to be in the

least afraid of either party. Certainly, he needed not to fear Gamaliel. Gamaliel would be glad to see him at any time, and to hear his story. Gamaliel was not a hero; but he liked to meet heroes.

As they looked at the flaming torches above the distant Temple, Nicodemus spoke.

"It was under the torches of the Feast of Tabernacles that Jesus said, 'I am the Light of the World.'"

"Forty years ago at this season," replied Gaspar, "Melchior, Balthazar, and I saw a light and followed it. It was a star — a light for the world, indeed!"

"Ah, yes!" cried Saul, "I too have seen the Light of the World — a blinding vision at mid-day! It was when I rode so hotly to Damascus ——"

"Saul, Saul!" interrupted Gamaliel, "thou hast told us that story already! 'Tis indeed a wondrous tale; yet wilt thou do nothing henceforward but repeat it?"

"Forgive me, my father," replied the younger man. "In very truth it seems to me that, should I speak all my life of nothing else save my vision in the desert, I were well employed. For think what that vision proves — that the Star of the East, guiding the devout children of another faith; the torch of the Temple, shining above the worship of the chosen people;

and the glory that flooded the desert, and out of which came the voice which made me a messenger to the Gentiles, — all are the same, the Lord Jesus, the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world! I have seen him often in the desert of Arabia since that day, and learned from him many things not possible to utter. Yet hath he not told me all that I fain would know. Guidance in truth, yea, into depths and heights of truth beyond measurement, have I found — but for the facts of earthly history I must needs go to my earthly brethren; wherefore, I make this hasty journey to Jerusalem, and am truly glad to meet in thy house these witnesses of the Lord's birth, and life, and death, and resurrection. Yet crave I no witness to his victory over death, being myself a witness! I was not in Jerusalem when he was crucified and rose again; and at first I would not believe any tale of those days — except the tale that his disciples had stolen his body from the tomb and falsely declared him to be risen. Now, I would fain hear more. Speak, O Nicodemus!"

But Nicodemus turned with reverence towards Gamaliel, saying, "Tell him what thou knowest!" and Gamaliel spoke.

"Thy prophet's death was a shameful thing, a capture by a hired mob and a murder under the form of law, through the weakness of a corrupt coward. Neither

Nicodemus nor I received any notice of the illegal midnight meeting of the Council, of which we both were members. Nor did we hear of the proceedings before Herod and Pilate, until the prisoner had been turned over to the Roman guard for public execution and the court had adjourned for the day. It was then too late for any appeal or rescue. Thou knowest that I am not — that is, I can scarcely say whether I be or no — a believer in this thy Jesus. Sometimes I think — but no matter for that now. If I had known of his arrest in time, I would certainly have sent some hint to the hundred thousand men of Galilee who lay encamped that night on the slope of the Mount of Olives — the multitude which had come with him to Jerusalem, and had brought him into the city with palm-branches and hosannas and hosts of children. The rest of the population and the pilgrims were favorable to him likewise; they applauded when he cleansed the Temple courts a second time of the cheating traffickers in cattle and doves and sacred Maccabean money. It was a vile trade, controlled by that ‘serpent family of Annas,’ and could be maintained only by the connivance of the Roman governor. Yet they did not dare to arrest him openly, for fear of the people.”

“I know of that wicked family and its

doings," said Gaspar. "Nicodemus wrote me at length about them, after Jesus had cleansed the Temple court the first time."

"And I heard rumors of such things," added Saul, "while I was a youth at the university. Certainly I remember how the cattle and doves and money-changers used to make a Babel of the Temple court, and how the people cursed, with bated breath, the serpent family of Annas."

"Then need I explain no further," continued Gamaliel, "the general feeling among the population and the pilgrims, who shouted for Jesus of Nazareth, though he was a stranger to them. But the fighting Galileans knew him well, and would have rescued him, even from a Roman guard, if it were possible. Yet even they could not face unarmed a whole Roman garrison. They had had in their own province a terrible lesson of the hopelessness of resistance to Roman armies. If they could but have had early tidings of the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, just below their own camp, they might have rescued him tumultuously. But after he had been delivered to Pilate, and sentenced to death in the name of Roman law, nothing could be done. In truth, the Galilean pilgrims entered the city that morning barely in time to join the horrified and helpless crowd which accompanied the prisoner,

encircled by Roman soldiers, to the place of crucifixion. Nor did I hear anything of the affair before that time! It was an awful, irretrievable crime!"

"It is, O Gamaliel!" quoth Nicodemus, "as thou hast said. Neither of us two knew or foresaw or dreamed of the sudden conspiracy and its result. Both thou, who didst not believe in him, and I, who believed in him secretly, were convinced that he was for the moment safe, by reason of the popular support."

"But," said Gaspar, "how came it that these plotters of murder gained so easily the aid of the Roman governor?"

"Yes!" added Saul, who had been singularly silent, lost in painful reminiscences, during Gamaliel's narrative. For these were facts which he ought to have known, and could have ascertained, if, before he plunged into the conflict as a destroyer of Christians, he had taken pains to learn more about the condemnation of Jesus. So now it was with modesty and shame that he said, "Yes; I am a Roman citizen, and I know both the Roman and the Jewish law. This surrender of the Lord seems to have been in violation of both!"

Gamaliel nodded to Nicodemus, who took up the tale. "I know Pilate," said he, "and I can explain, perhaps, better than any other man, his behavior in this case. In the first place, as I told thee,

Gaspar, in my letter, he had been accustomed, like his predecessors in office, to accept from the thieving Temple gang of Annas an annual gift of money — call it what you will, it was really a bribe, paid for his silence as to their crimes, and his aid at the one point where their schemes were weak. For the thing they had most to fear was a sudden outbreak of popular indignation, involving public exposure of their iniquity. Upon such an exposure, the Roman authorities would doubtless take the high-priesthood away from them, — and sell it to some other party less odious to the people. In fact, the Romans were never sorry for a good opportunity to make a change so profitable to the imperial treasury. But it was the imperial treasury, not the governor's pocket, which received that profit. Hence, it was the interest of the governor not to favor such a change, but to keep on good terms with the priestly incumbents. Moreover, the only service which they required from him was one which it seemed to be his duty to render. For the chief demand made by the Roman emperor of his officers throughout the world was that they should preserve order."

"True!" interrupted Gaspar. "Order is Rome's first law; and when we consider how wonderful a change has been wrought throughout the world by the 'Pax Ro-

mana' of Augustus and his successors, we must confess that such a law deserves to be the first. I, who have just traveled in comfort and safety the long route from Persia, must bear witness to that!"

"No doubt you are right," replied Nicodemus; "yet a good law may be made, as in this instance, to cover a vile wrong. For whenever some swindled pilgrim began to cry aloud the injury he had suffered from the Annas monopoly, the governor, at a word from Annas, would promptly and most properly send a guard to arrest the disturber, and teach him, by an informal imprisonment of a couple of days, not to break the peace. And, in the case of Jesus of Nazareth, reported as an offender of that class whom it would be well to arrest privately in order to avoid popular tumult, Pilate had simply ordered the necessary detail of a file of soldiers and thought no more of it.

"In the morning, however, just after dawn, Pilate opened his court, to deal with the prisoners arrested since sundown of the previous night."

"It is a great pity," interrupted Gaspar, "that, with all our ingenious modern improvements, we have no means of making a really good artificial light, whereby we may equalize the difference between day and night at different seasons. Candles, torches, and smoky lamps seem to be all

that our civilization has accomplished; but even these are only utilized by those who feast, or engage in nocturnal expeditions, or watch by the sick, or keep dim lights burning before sacred shrines. Under ordinary circumstances we all go to bed when darkness comes, and arise at daylight — a bad habit, if it can be called a habit at all, since it varies between different places, and, even in the same place, with the season of the year. The astronomers of my country declare that this variation between darkness and light is determined by the stars and can never be altered.”

“However that may be,” resumed Nicodemus, “it was certainly unfortunate that the governor ascended his judicial seat so early on that morning. For nobody outside of the arch-conspirators had learned at that hour of the seizure of Jesus of Nazareth during the night, except Claudia Procula, the governor’s wife. To her he had incidentally mentioned, the night before, his detail of soldiers to make the arrest of a pretended prophet from Galilee, already the cause of a disturbance in the Temple and likely, if not silenced, to repeat the offense. ‘These feasts of the Jews,’ he had said, ‘worry me beyond endurance. Some brawling fanatic always has to be arrested, that order may be preserved!’

“This I learned afterwards from Claudia herself, whom I knew and who, like me, had seen and heard Jesus and was already secretly a believer. But what could she do? The wife of a Roman judge was forbidden to intercede with him in behalf of any party coming before him for trial. Yet, on the other hand, the Romans had a superstitious respect for dreams; and Claudia reflected that nobody could be punished for telling a dream, which might be, in truth, as the Romans believed, a message from heaven. And horrid dreams she had had, both waking and sleeping. So, after Pilate had departed, she sent a slave in haste to him, with the message: ‘Have thou nothing to do with that innocent man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him!’ As she afterwards explained to me, she did not dare ask her husband to decide the case in favor of Jesus. All that she could venture was to beg that, because of the supernatural warning, he would not decide it at all. This counsel, in fact, he desperately sought to follow. Finding, to his great surprise, that the accusers of the prisoner brought before him demanded no less than a sentence of death, he endeavored in every way to escape that responsibility. He referred the case to Herod; he declared it to be beyond his jurisdiction; he thrice acquitted the accused; he washed his hands

of the guilt of condemnation; he writhed in torture with the thought of the awful injustice demanded of him. Yet at last he yielded in impotent rage, yet in cowardly fear, to that demand. For the conspirators threatened to appeal to Tiberius Cæsar; and he knew that an imperial inquiry, revealing his private reception of bribes, would be his political ruin. Probably they would not have dared to carry out their threat, since that would have ruined them also. But cowards do not stop to think; and Pilate made an unnecessary, as well as a base, surrender.

"I was not present at the crucifixion of the Lord. But the tidings of it came to me with tremendous power, forcing me to do what I had so long postponed — declare myself his disciple. And after consulting with Joseph of Arimathea, I hastened to the governor's palace, to beg of him the body of Jesus.

"The officer on guard at the door of that magnificent house warned me in a whisper that the governor was in no mood to receive petitions. 'He has been shivering and muttering all day,' said the officer. 'He angrily repulsed the priests, when they sought to have him change the inscription on the cross of that Galilean whom he condemned to death this morning; and he has been shaken more and more by the events of this strange, dread-

ful day — the darkness and earthquake, which he could realize for himself, and the rending of the veil in the Temple, and the stories of the appearance of the dead from the hillside tombs, torn open by the earthquake, which I have reported to him from time to time, as I heard them from fear-stricken passers-by. The centurion who commanded the guard at Calvary is here, to make his report; but he dares not venture into the governor's presence until he is called. If you will be guided by me, you will not enter now.'

"'Let me pass,' I said; 'my errand will not wait!' Even Roman discipline seemed to have been paralyzed that day; for the soldier stood aside, and I went in.

"I found Pilate seated on the throne in the now empty hall of judgment. He was rubbing one hand with the other, as if still washing away the guilt of his unjust decree, while he gazed with haggard face upon a pillar to which the innocent prisoner of that morning had been chained for scourging, and which was stained with the victim's blood. The spectacle of Pilate's fear removed all fear from me; and, advancing towards him, I said: 'My lord Governor, I am Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, yet a disciple of Jesus of Galilee, whom thou didst this day condemn to the cross; and I come to beg of thee his body for burial!'

“At my words Pilate started, as if from sleep. ‘What!’ he muttered, ‘Is the man already dead?’ and called for the centurion. That officer promptly entered — a splendid young soldier in full armor. ‘Speak!’ cried the governor, ‘is the man dead?’ The centurion hesitated for a moment, then saluted respectfully but with a stately look of independence as he replied, ‘Lord Governor, there has been a great mistake. He is dead; but he was the Son of God!’

“Pilate fell back at first in complete collapse. Then, looking upon me and remembering my request, he waved his hand feebly towards me, murmuring ‘Do what you will, only go, all of you!’ Upon this hint I acted; and with the aid of the centurion to whom I explained my desire, I gained possession of the body of the Lord. As we walked out together to the hill of Calvary, now deserted by the frightened multitude, the centurion told me many things — how the dying Lord had cried to his Father; how he had prayed that his enemies and mockers might be forgiven, because they knew not what they did. ‘When he spake that,’ quoth the centurion, ‘he looked upon me! For truly I knew not, until that moment, what I was doing. And I was filled with remorse — only *Father forgive them!* still sounded in my ears, as after the ringing of a sweet bell. I have

seen many brave men — Gauls and Thracians — die upon the field, shouting defiance; and I have seen many men suffer the torture of the cross, cursing the law and the emperor, or sullenly silent, or whimpering with pain and the terror of death. But never before did one accused and condemned make a throne of his cross, and in one breath both judge and pardon! The inscription over his head called him in ridicule the King of the Jews. As to that, I know naught and care little. Methinks the Jews are not worthy of such a king. But he is king in my heart, henceforward and forever. Alas! that he hath left too soon the world he should have ruled. I had heard of him and seen him once before, for I was one of the soldiers who were baptized by John at Bethabara, and I heard John call him Lamb of God! But I saw him not again, until he was delivered into my hands to be crucified. And on the cross one of the robber chiefs who were punished with him — a brave man! — called him Lord and King! and my soul said Amen!

“While the centurion thus talked, we reached the place and found there Joseph of Arimathea, and Mary the mother, and one or two more, waiting for the permission which I brought from the trembling governor.”

“Pilate has hardened his heart since

then," said Gamaliel. "He is cold and contemptuous, even to his partners in wickedness, and more cruel than ever. I fancy he will meet ere long the doom he feared. He will be exposed, disgraced, and exiled; and, proud Roman as he is, will doubtless seek refuge in suicide — dying without hope; for it cannot be said of him that he knew not what he did, when he surrendered an innocent prisoner!"

"Nor could that excuse be given for Peter," replied Nicodemus; "yet Peter was forgiven! Aye, even over Judas, I am told, the Lord hung with yearning pity to the last, and only saved him not, because he would not be saved, but rushed headlong to his own destruction!"

"But all that has passed away," cried Saul, "for the Lord is risen to the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father. Yea, in that glory have I seen him — even as Stephen, whom I helped to slay, saw him first! Ye speak with doubt concerning the infinite forgiving love of the Lord — but me, the chief of sinners, he hath forgiven. Who am I, that should deny his pardon to any fellow-man! I pray thee, Nicodemus, tell us of those solemn days after his resurrection, when he spake concerning the Kingdom of Heaven!"

"Indeed, there is much to tell of that time," replied Nicodemus; "for the teaching of those days has enlightened us all,

explaining many things which we had not understood, and adding many things, deep and glorious, which we could not have borne to hear before. So now we wait for his speedy return in power and splendor to finish his work. But of that thou wilt best hear from Peter, whom likewise he forgave, and appointed to the care of his flock."

So Nicodemus spake little more that night; but Saul chanted wondrous rhapsodies of his experience in the desert of Arabia; and, at the request of all, Gamaliel told how things were going in Jerusalem; how corruption and greed and intrigue were growing daily worse among the politicians; how the people were drawn away by demagogue leaders, and split into useless factions; how hatred of the rich and of the Romans was bringing about the disregard of all law, human and divine, and breeding dreams of riot and plunder; how even the Christian church in Jerusalem, though quiet and peaceable in behavior, was prevented from doing its part in the maintenance of regular order and industry, first by its expectation of a speedy return of its Lord, and secondly by the habit, born of that expectation, of living from day to day upon the benefactions of its more wealthy members.

"Your people," said Gamaliel, "do not plunder the rich; but the few among

them who have property in Jerusalem, and a larger number who have property elsewhere, have freely contributed to the common support, until the whole body is receiving all things and giving nothing. Speaking as a friend to all, I must approve the wisdom of a saying of your good Jesus of which I have heard, that it is more blessed to give than to receive; and I will add that, to my mind, the privilege of giving depends upon the duty of earning and the right of owning. But, above all, I understand that your Jesus directed his followers beforehand to fly from Jerusalem when the final crisis came; so that they do not really care for the fate of the Holy City, in which they are only sojourners. Now I," he continued with a tone of mingled despair and pride, "shall abide the fate of my nation and my city. And therefore, however much I may admire, and even love, his character and doctrine, I cannot decide to accept your Master as mine, if my allegiance to him would oblige me to forsake, even in the last extremity, my post and my duty here. You tell me of a light of the world and of a Saviour of the world, who will triumph over the destruction of both the Temple and the town. But my answer is, that I follow the light I have, and according to that light I will stand in my place declaring and defending, so far as

I may, justice, mercy, and truth in the city of Jehovah. It is true, I see no human hope; but my duty remains. If human help fail, and divine help be not vouchsafed, I can at least die with Jerusalem!"

Nicodemus, Gaspar, and Saul, with due reverence and affection, strove in vain to move the old rabbi's decision. To all of them he replied with a quiet smile, "I know what you would say. I have pondered it long and deeply already. I respect and love you all, as I believe each of you respects and loves me. You will not deem me an enemy like Caiaphas, or a frivolous fool like Herod, or a traitor like Judas, if I follow my own light. We all seek the same end — a New Jerusalem. As for me, I must seek it through the old Jerusalem, so long as I live and my Holy City continues upon earth! Yet I sympathize with your hope of a New World and a New Age, in which dwelleth righteousness; and I am glad to hear what you have to say concerning that hope."

Thereupon Gaspar spake long and well of the weariness and woe of many nations through which he had traveled, and of their expectation and need of a deliverer, and of the signs of his coming. To all of which Saul answered, with kindling glow, "And I, even I, am appointed to break the great tidings of everlasting joy to all

peoples, even as Peter is called to feed the flock of Jerusalem!"

"Thou wilt find us ready to hear!" replied Gaspar, solemnly; "but it is of the Saviour of the world, not the Messiah of the Jews, that we would hear!"

"To the Jew first, and afterward to the Gentile," quickly rejoined Saul. "Howbeit, the Jew has heard the news already, and they whom Moses and the prophets have led to Christ are free in him. Blessed will be all those who, without Moses or the prophets, nevertheless find their way to him —"

"By following his star in the East! —" added Gaspar. "Oh, my friends, if we have found him, let us follow him, not disputing over the different ways that brought us together!"

"Verily," said the hasty but generous Saul, "Thou didst recognize him first of all, bringing him royal gifts on that night of lights when he was born. And lo! the sign of his return!"

As he spake, the distant lights above the Temple went out, and the first streaks of dawn came in the east. In silence they waited, until the golden disk of the sun appeared. Then Gaspar, the Persian, prostrated himself before the sun, saying, "Hail! symbol of Auramazda the Giver of Life, who created thee to sustain life, and to be the light of the world! Hail,

new birth of a new day, the Day of the Lord!"

The others did not imitate Gaspar's prostration, for such was not the custom of their fathers. But they bowed their heads while he prayed, and their hearts said Amen to his prayer. After a moment Nicodemus murmured, as one who recalls a sweet, dear poem, "Born again! As the day, so the soul! 'Thou must be born again'—so spake the Master unto me! Ah! blessed be his name, we may be born again!"

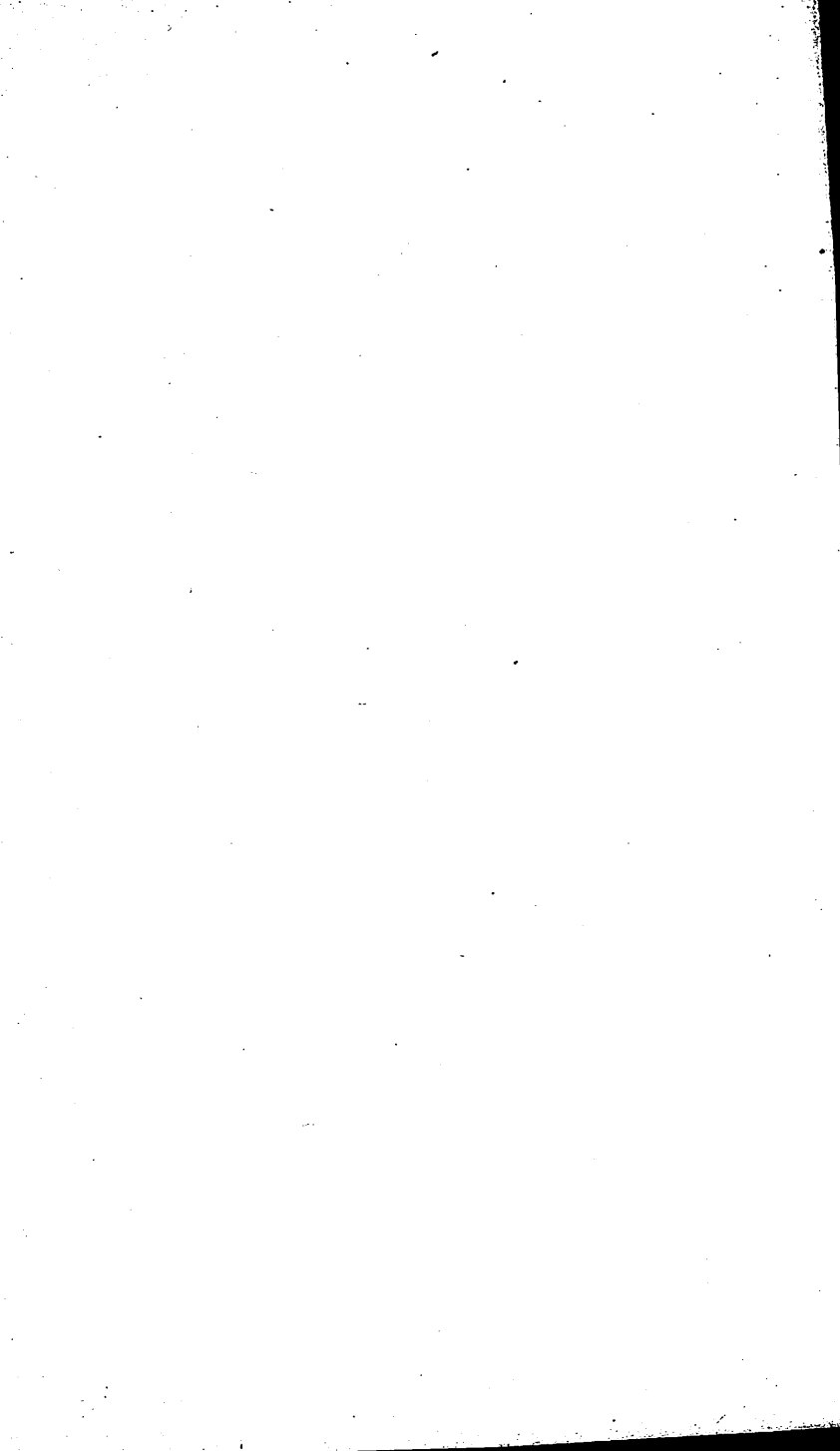
But Saul stood erect before the sunrise, his face like another sunrise, and threw out his arms as if he would embrace the world, as he cried, "May Christ be born again in us, — our hope of glory!"

A little later, they went their several ways, Saul to visit Peter privately in Jerusalem; Gaspar and Nicodemus to attend a quiet meeting of believers at Bethany, where they hoped to meet Lazarus.

After his guests had departed, Gamaliel's servants clothed him with the robes of his office, and saddled for him the white mule on which he was accustomed to ride into Jerusalem to preside over the Council. And, as he rode, he said to himself:

"Would that all which these men believe were true! But I fear this bright light of the world is not He that should come for

my people Israel. We must still 'look for another'; our Christ has not yet been born in Bethlehem of Judea! And yet, would it were true! For I too love his appearing!"



BS 550

.R26

Raymond, Rossiter
Worthington, 1840-
1918.

The feast of
lights,

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



16 799 550

BS 550
.R26

Raymond, Rossiter
Worthington, 1840-
1918.

The feast of
lights,

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARY

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIE

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



16 799 550